

Hays County Master Naturalists NEWSLETTER



-- right here at home -- in the Hill Country

June, 2011

Chapter Events

Chapter Board Meeting

The next board meeting will be held on Thursday, June 2nd, at the Camp Jacob Watershed Education Center at the Jacob's Well Natural Area, from 6:30 to 8:30 PM. A map is available [here](#). The meeting is open to members and the public.

If you have any questions or items for the agenda, please contact Jeff Vasgaard, pres@haysmn.org, by May 31st.

Chapter Meeting

The next chapter meeting will be held on Thursday, June 23rd, from 6:30pm to 8:00pm, at a location to be announced later.

The guest speaker will be Bill Carr with the Texas Chapter of The Nature Conservancy. Plant expert extraordinaire!

If you have announcements you would like to have presented at the chapter meeting or suggestions for topics/speakers, please contact Brad Kimmel, vp@haysmn.org.



A Naturalist's View

Lance Jones is currently project leader for the Hays County Invaders, Project #1101. He was in the Class of 2008 and has also served on the Training Committee.

Two things became evident as I started Master Naturalist classes in 2008 (Roadrunners II): (1) there was a lot to learn and (2) good, like-minded people were there to help with the process.

The sometimes daunting amount of reading was interspersed with field trips, site visits and volunteer projects that moved the learning process outdoors and hands-on. The now tactile learning was assisted by master naturalists with experience and knowledge that they were willing to share. Many times, they repeated the answers as the information slowly took hold.

Because there was so much information to digest I found that concentrating on specific areas like grasses and plant identification made becoming a master naturalist more manageable. Over the years I've been able to add a little birding and trail construction into my limited

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repertoire of knowledge. The state conference in New Braunfels this past year was helpful and I was able to attend all three days of classes. I also had the opportunity to meet members from other chapters and parts of our large state, which was helpful as I enjoy traveling to Big Bend and the coast.

Little by little I've added some confidence and with the help of more knowledgeable folks like Travis Gallo and Minnette Marr I was able to host the Texas Invasives class for Hays County. In three months we've logged a 143 observations of invasive plants and almost 24 volunteer hours. Our county extension agent, Richard Parrish, and Bari Conley are in category (2) above.

Kudos to my training committee who laid the foundation in 2008 for what we continue to learn as our classroom is ever evolving. Two trips to Big Bend with Tom Watson in a different eco-region expanded my appreciation for how much there is to learn and my interest in invasive plants. Thanks to Leah Laszewski for her patience in telling me for the tenth time the name of that plant/tree/bird.

The current drought brings awareness to the frailty of our environment but also offers lessons to be noted. For the first time in six years that I have lived in San Marcos I observed a turkey walking calmly across the neighborhood street. I watched as a hummingbird flew to within inches of the spray nozzle I was holding and hovered for a minute.

There is much to do and we will be leaving a fair share for those who come after. We're realizing that we have to protect and conserve the available water if there is to be a day after tomorrow. I believe we're more aware of what our impact is and what we must do to mitigate or, at least compromise our impact. One of the many things we learned is that the environment is dynamic and every change brings opportunity.

- Lance Jones



Featured Project

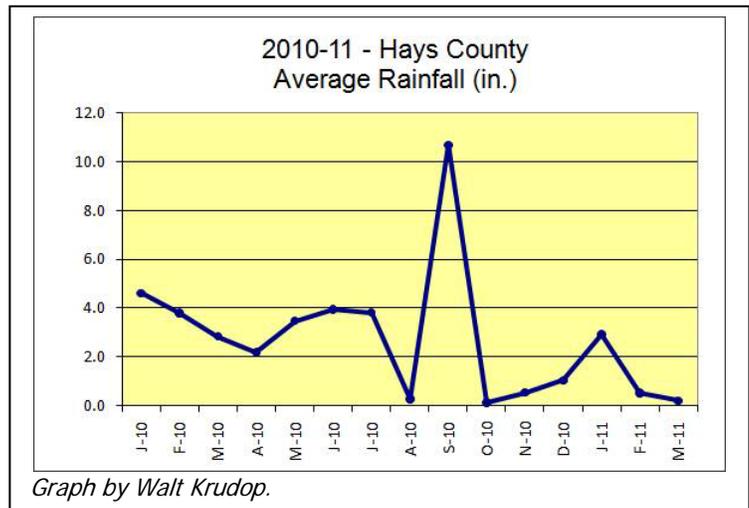
Hays County Rainfall Monitoring Project #803

The Chapter's Rainfall Monitoring project started in 2005 to track and record the rainfall across Hays County. There had been anecdotal information that the rainfall in the southeast part of the county was higher than the northwest part and there was interest in whether actual data would confirm the observation.

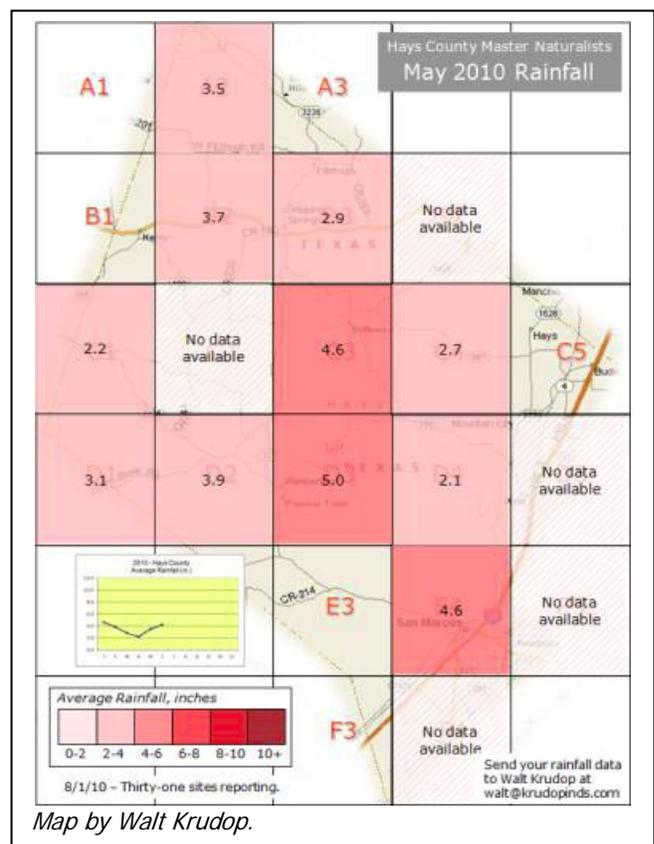
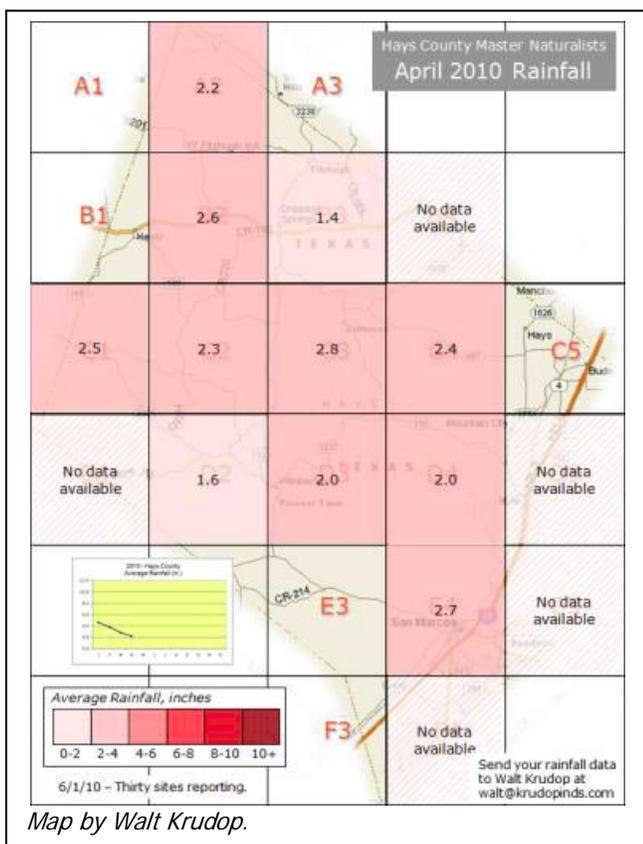
Since then, the project goals have expanded a bit. One goal is to create a sense within the Chapter that monitoring and recording the environmental conditions and changes in the conditions is a basic tool for the naturalist in understanding and learning how these changes affect the environment. A second goal is to create a record of the rainfall across the county to look for any trends. A third goal is to develop a database that can be used to support efforts to increase the use of rainwater harvesting as a soul source of potable and non-potable water.

The project's leader since its inception is Walt Krudop. Walt served for many years as the Chapter Volunteer Projects Coordinator. Walt was in the Class of 2001 and has also served on the Training Committee.

Walt actively recruits new participants to the project from each new Training Class. This year's class has already provided 10 new contributors. The more contributors, the better, so if you're regularly monitoring your rainfall, please send it in. If you're letting your rain gauge, then get it out and put it to use!



Now in its 7th year, the project has gathered data from most of the county. You may find out more about the project and it's background at the chapter web page: <http://haysmn.org/rainfall/>. The online reporting form is there too.



Referring to the graph above, Walt says "Looking back over the past six months, Oct, 2010 through Mar 2011 (I'm using my rainfall for March of only 0.3 in.) it's looking a bit scary, over that six month period we've only gotten 5.2 in. total rainfall. And if it weren't for 10.7 in. last September, our eight month total would be 5.3 in. It hasn't been this low since the Sep 05 to

Feb 06 period when we only received 4.8 in. Here's a chart of our rainfall over the past 15 months."

The following members are active participants: Art & Mary Arizpe, Margaret Baker, Debi Bowers, Donna Browning, Bob Burke, Larry Calvert, Tyler Carlson, Steve Carter, John & Cindy Cassidy, Anne Child, Jim Donohoe, David Doonan, Warren Ely, Ray Franklin, Randy Garst, Ginger & LaRay Geist, Eva Gomez, Tom Hausler, Steve Janda, Lance Jones, Margie Kidd, Lucille Kirkham, Patty Koeninger, Walt Krudop, Linda Land, Leah Laszewski, Sandy Lucas, Jackie Mattice, Charles Maxey, Richard McBride, Jim McMeans, Joe Piazza, Beth Ramey, Bob Richardson, Nancy Russell, Leigh Sebera, Herb Smith, Keenan Smith, Bonnie & Terry Tull, Jeff Vasgaard, Frank Walker, Lin Weber, David Womer, Lou Zyla.

Please contact Walt, walt@krudopinds.com, to learn more and to help.



Chapter News

Birding Hike at Ringtail Ridge

Being a Master Naturalist means always being ready to learn. That's why when Bonnie Tull led a birding hike on May 14th at the Ringtail Ridge natural area off Ranch Road 12 in San Marcos, she insisted we bring our binoculars and guide books. And learn we did, as we discovered painted buntings in the tree tops along the Ridge Loop section of trail. The wooded section also yielded a blue jay, wrens, and chickadees. The drought has taken its toll on the natural areas and thistles, while abundant, don't proliferate as they did last year. Lesser gold finches and house finches still harvest the thistle.



Bonnie Tull leading the hike. Photo by Dick McBride.

Members of the San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance also learned how to improve the habitat to encourage a diversity of birds and viewing opportunities.

- Lance Jones

Blue Hole Park Work Day

The first Blue Hole Park work day was held on May 21st.

We helped plant hundreds of pots of native grasses and shrubs. A total of 81 volunteers showed up of which we were 17 or so. Good showing! This park is one of 250 of its kind in the world. Locally driven, focused on sustainable restoration, and environmentally smart! Watching it's progress should be very interesting. More work days ahead, they promise, planting when the drought eases.

-Susan Nenny

On the Trail

What's the difference between a bug and an insect?

Trainees Study Entomology

When I was a kid, there was a neighbor boy who always had a frog in his pocket and a cigar box full of bugs. We girls would skedaddle in all directions screaming at the top of our lungs when he tried to show off his prize catches. I had a vivid flashback about those experiences on May 7 when the MN trainees met at Freeman Ranch and the very knowledgeable and engaging Dr. Chris Nice talked about insects and butterflies. There are too many years separating Chris and myself so he couldn't possibly have been that boy who wreaked terror in us girls but I'm still imagining him as a youngster who spent plenty of time exploring and collecting in the outdoors. I also suspect he had a room full of prize possessions and a very patient mother!

Chris received a bachelor's degree in biology from the University of Minnesota and a PhD. in ecology from the University of California/Davis. He came to San Marcos in 2001 to teach and do research in the Department of Biology at Texas State University. He currently serves as an Associate Professor with a special interest in evolution, ecology and genetics of butterflies and several other kinds of organisms. Chris has published a range of papers and publications, reviewed articles, given assorted talks, and supervises a group of lucky graduate students. It should come as no surprise that he has garnered many awards for his efforts. You could have heard a pin drop when the self-described "professional butterfly nerd" delivered his entomology and



Volunteers at Blue Hole. Photo provided by Susan Nenny.



Kayte Wilcox caught a dusky skipper! Photo by Robert Currie.

Lepidoptera lecture to the trainees. The group was so absorbed that someone asked if we could spend an extra half-hour in the classroom. Eventually we sauntered outside for some hands-on practice.

The drought has not been kind to the butterfly population this year, but Chris directed the class to a patch of thistle along the roadside where there were some successes netting moths, skippers, and small butterflies. No magnificent Monarchs or rare finds, but it was a morning full of romping and swatting at the few species we were able to capture and then release.



Lucille Kirkham and Lin Weber examine a catch. Photo by Eva Gomez.

Some class members put their photography skills to work and snapped some remarkable pictures while Chris provided expert commentary each time a class member shared their reward. While classes of prior years have had better wildlife pickings, the Painted Buntings made magic out of their morning. Here are some of their reactions:

Leigh Sebera: Dr. Nice was everything I could ask for in a 'bug' teacher enthusiastic, respectful and full of scientific, practical, and fantastic information about insects. I learned that centipedes bite, fire ants find this weather inhospitable (one

good thing about the drought!), and scorpions eat spiders. I learned the difference between butterflies (balls), moths, and skippers (hooks) and that the stuff that comes off on my fingers (scales) when catching a butterfly won't hurt me or the insect. Today, when my neighbor told me of her lifelong fascination with bugs I did not recoil, but thought, "What an interesting life she leads."

Marilyn Brister: Butterfly boot camp was eye opening. I learned about the fritillary that had decimated my passion vine. The speaker was extremely knowledgeable and had a good sense of humor. He tried to answer every question. I stayed for the extra hour and it was really worth it.

Frank and Judy Walker: As it happened, we were fortunate enough to visit the Butterfly Collection at the Houston Museum of Natural Science on Monday, with our two young grandsons. It was quite rewarding to be able to understand what we were seeing "up close and personal," and to be able to relate some of what we had learned to our grandsons. Doctor Nice is a treasure!

Kim Pankratz: I first had the privilege of hearing Dr. Nice's presentation on butterflies at the Emily Ann's caterpillar round up in Wimberley. That day inspired me to start my own little wildscape garden to attract butterflies and humming birds. Then as if I didn't already have all kinds of respect for Dr. Nice's insect knowledge, I was again impressed at our class last week. I now have a new healthy respect for all insects. It takes all kinds to make this world go around.

Leah Laszewski, a member of the training committee, indicates that entomology is one MN class whose format hasn't really changed very much over the years. The biggest disparity is on the nature walks that are weather driven. The number and kinds of insects caught depends on moisture, temperature and foliage differences.

A bug is a pest. An insect is an important part of the ecosystem.

- Lucille Trail Kirkham

May Chapter Meeting

Matt McCaw, Ecological Restoration Specialist, City of Austin Wild Conservation Division, gave a nice talk on the work done at the Onion Creek Water Quality Protection Land. Tom Watson is our chapter's project leader for this work (Project #426), and many chapter members have contributed.

Matt gave us an overview of the two main efforts at the property: native grass seeding and invasive species mapping of chinaberry trees. Matt discussed these efforts are in support of their overall objective – to increase the water quality and quantity in the Barton Springs section of the Edwards Aquifer.

Grass seeding is partially done with a mechanical seed drill, but the area covered is dwarfed by the areas manually seeded by volunteers.

The chinaberry tree mapping is now being followed by an eradication effort. The work has also become a leading example of how the City of Austin wants to proceed with monitoring and eradication efforts on all city properties.

Chapter Host Committee

The Chapter's Host Committee Chair is still open. Perhaps you would be interested in serving on or chairing this committee. Please contact Jeff Vasgaard, pres@haysmn.org.

You may find a description of this committee in the [Chapter Operating Handbook](#), Section B, on our web page.

HaysMN Forum

The forum is a great learning resource. Be sure to check it out. To join the HaysMN Forum, simply go to the haysmn.org web site and look for the Forum application in the menu.

Please let Herb Smith, web@haysmn.org, know if you have any questions or suggestions. Better yet, use the Forum to discuss the Forum.

Reporting Reminder

Reports for May 2011 are due by June 7th. Please submit your reports of Volunteer and Advanced Training hours by using the friendly report forms at www.haysmn.org.

As a reminder, 8 hours of Advanced Training and 40 hours of Volunteer work are required each year to recertify. You have until the end of the year to complete these hours.

If you are uncertain about your status, please contact Beth Ramey, hourshaysmn@gmail.com, and she can send you a report.

Newsletter Items

Have you read a good book lately? Submit a short review and share with the chapter! Have some neat photos of a volunteer or training activity? Let us see them! Do you have news about yourself or another HCMN? Send it in!

Please send your comments, news items, and photos to news@haysmn.org.

Members News

Ben Adair

Ben sends us a nice photo of a fawn which decided to hide out on his porch.



A white-tailed fawn. Photo by Ben Adair.

Tom Hausler

Tom reports that the month of May was great for Warblers. He spotted Golden-cheeked, Yellow, Black & White, Wilson and a Nashville.



A Golden-cheeked Warbler. Photo by Tom Hausler.



A Yellow Warbler. Photo by Tom Hausler.

This section is your opportunity to update the chapter about what you've been doing. Perhaps you went on an interesting field trip and took some nice photos; basically, anything you'd like to share.

Please send your news items to news@haysmn.org.



Advanced Training Opportunities

Please watch your emails for upcoming Advanced Training Opportunities.



Volunteer Opportunities

Please watch your emails for upcoming Volunteer Opportunities.



State and National News

Record farming, ranching loss seen

According to the May 17th issue of the U.S. Drought Monitor, the entire state of Texas is in a drought. At this time last year, 84 % of the state was drought-free. You may read the entire article at the mySA web site, [here](#).



Local News

Hays County Regional Habitat Conservation Plan Is Approved!

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced approval of the Hays County RHCP on May 13, 2011. The associated incidental take permit is expected to be issued to Hays County in June 2011. You may find out more at the [Hays County Habitat Conservation Plan](#) web page.



Links to Chapter Sponsors and Partners

Sponsors:

Texas Master Naturalist -- State Website -- masternaturalist.tamu.edu
Texas AgriLife Extension -- texasextension.tamu.edu
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department -- www.tpwd.state.tx.us/

Agencies of Interest:

Bamberger Ranch -- bambergerranch.org
Native Plant Society of Texas -- www.npsot.org
San Marcos Greenbelt Alliance -- www.smgreenbelt.org
San Marcos River Foundation -- www.sanmarcosriver.org
Texas Outdoor Women's Network -- www.townsanmarcos.org
Texas Cooperative Extension -- Sea Grant Program -- texas-sea-grant.tamu.edu
Texas Forest Service -- txforestservice.tamu.edu
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers -- www.usace.army.mil
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U.S.D.A. Natural Resource Conservation Service -- www.nrcs.usda.gov
Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority -- www.gbra.org

Partners

Austin Nature Day -- www.austinnatureday.org
LBJ Wildflower Center -- www.wildflower.org
San Marcos Nature Center -- www.ci.san-marcos.tx.us/departments/parks/Nature_Center.html
Gorge Preservation Society -- www.canyongorge.org